



Safe physical and online environments

Child Safe Standard 8



Introduction

Children and young people spend time in many environments, such as classrooms, sports fields, foyers, dance studios, scout halls, youth groups, bathrooms, websites, and online chats. Every space they are part of must be designed and maintained with safety in mind. This Standard is about taking proactive steps to make both physical and digital environments safe and inclusive.


It is about organisations setting expectations for appropriate engagement between staff/volunteers and children and young people online or via digital devices. It is also important to have the right processes to identify and mitigate risks early.

It is also about mitigating opportunities for harm to occur in physical environments.

Balancing safety and privacy

Children and young people have the right to privacy, which must be balanced against their right to safety – how this is balanced is dependent on a range of factors. Children and young people who depend on adults for their physical care are at particular risk in the physical environment if the organisation does not have good child safe practices in place.

Empowering children and young people to have a say over their own bodies, coupled with robust staff/volunteer screening, clear guidance on boundary setting, procedures that are understood and followed, and supervision all help to create a safer physical environment.



When staff and volunteers remain alert to the interactions between children and young people and peers or other adults, the opportunity for harm to occur in secluded areas, closed rooms, and blind spots is reduced.

Recognising Developing Independence

As children and young people's capabilities increase, their right to and need for privacy often overtake their need for assistance. It is important for staff and volunteers to recognise and respect signs of increased independence and be alert to other adults who may not maintain appropriate boundaries or respect for children and young people's boundaries.

The importance of inclusion in physical and online spaces

Safe environments are also inclusive environments. Children and young people are more likely to feel safe when they can see themselves reflected in the space, through language, images, symbols, and the attitudes of the adults around them.

Knowing and implementing your organisation's anti-discrimination policies, as well as procedures for addressing bullying or racism by peers, adults, or other staff and volunteers, all help to create a safer physical environment.

The same applies online. Technology brings new opportunities, but also new risks including breaches of privacy, unsafe messaging, grooming, and bullying.

When organisations keep pace with how children and young people are interacting with the digital environment and staff and volunteers understand how to support children and young people in digital spaces, they are better able to manage those risks and model respectful behaviour.

Managing photos, videos, and digital content

A child safe organisation supports staff and volunteers to set and maintain professional boundaries in their interactions with children and young people and has policies and procedures for how digital images (photos, videos, etc) are created, stored, used, accessed, and disposed of.

Creating safe environments takes ongoing effort and awareness, but it is also one of the clearest ways to show children and young people that their safety matters.



It is important to remember that being child safe isn't about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions *you* can take within *your* organisation that contribute to creating and maintaining *safe physical and online environments*.



What staff and volunteers can do

- Conduct regular checks of physical spaces and address risks.
- Supervise children and young people during activities and transitions between spaces.
- Understand your organisation's policy on photography, social media, and online communication.
- Consider the psychological safety of the environment, not just whether it is physically secure.
- Involve children and young people in shaping spaces so they reflect their identities and preferences.
- Look out for children and young people who may be left out or feel uncomfortable and take steps to be inclusive.

This Standard reflects the preamble statement to the Standards by acknowledging that physical and digital environments are experienced differently by different children and young people. A room may feel safe to one child but overwhelming or unwelcoming to another. By seeking input and paying attention to how children and young people interact with a space, staff and volunteers can adapt their practice and help shape spaces that promote belonging.

Designing for inclusion

Designing for inclusion means thinking about mobility access, quiet zones, visual cues, culturally inclusive materials, and trusted adults being nearby. It also means being proactive about online safety and making sure policies are understood and followed.

